North Carolina 2026 Primary Elections

Some elections to watch · Primary Day: March 3, 2026

Compiled by Chris Cooper
from various sources
(see bottom for sources)
Primary Day: March 3, 2026

THE BASICS How voting works in this primary

① VOTE BY MAIL

Request deadline: **Feb. 21**
Completed ballots must be returned to the county board of elections by **March 3 at 7:30 pm** — either in person or by mail (postmark alone is not sufficient).
Exception — UOCAVA voters (active military & overseas citizens): ballots postmarked by March 3 are accepted through **March 10**.

② EARLY IN-PERSON

Feb. 12 – Feb. 28
Voters may cast a ballot at any early voting site in their county. Same-day registration was available throughout the period.
Early voting ended Saturday.

③ ELECTION DAY

Tuesday, March 3, 2026
Polls open **6:30 am – 7:30 pm**. Voters must cast their ballot at their assigned precinct — unlike early voting, Election Day voting is precinct-specific.

SECOND PRIMARY

NC requires a candidate to clear **30%** to win outright. If no one does, the second-place finisher may request a runoff.
Runoff election date: **May 12, 2026**.

THE BIG FIVE The marquee primaries of the cycle — 5 races

STATE SENATE · DISTRICT 26 · ROCKINGHAM/GUILFORD — R Primary

★ State Senate District 26 (R)

Phil Berger *Senate President Pro Tem, 24 yrs* **Sam Page** *Rockingham Co. Sheriff*

As Casey Kasem would say: number one with a bullet. Berger was first elected in 2000, became President Pro-Tem of the Senate in 2011, and in the intervening years has become the most powerful politician in NC. Berger has the Trump endorsement — but Trump has also called Page "GREAT" and praised both men as "outstanding people," an unusual hedge. Page, a longtime Rockingham County sheriff, entered the race despite arm-twisting from party leadership and a Trump request to drop out. The cash disparities are substantial — Berger has raised more than 40 times as much money as Page in direct expenditures, to say nothing of indirect expenditures. But there's still a chance Page wins. Early voting heavily favored Rockingham County (generally considered better for Page), despite the fact that Guilford has more registered voters. If Page wins, it will go down as the most important General Assembly primary in NC history — and arguably, in NC history, period.

`Rockingham 67% of R votes so far` `$1.6M vs $29K candidate $` `$2.8M outside pro-Berger` `Trump endorsement`

1ST CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT · NORTHEASTERN NC — R Primary

★ 1st Congressional District (R)

Laurie Buckhout *Army vet, briefly worked in Trump admin; lost to Davis by ~2K in 2024* **Bobby Hanig** *State Sen., Currituck Co.*
Eric Rouse *Lenoir County Commissioner* **Asa Buck** *Carteret Co. Sheriff* **Ashley-Nicole Russell** *Divorce attorney*

Mid-decade redistricting moved NC-1 — currently held by Democrat Don Davis — from a toss-up to a Republican lean. Buckhout — who briefly worked in the Trump administration — enters with a significant cash advantage, funded largely by a personal loan to her own campaign. Trump has not endorsed in this race. All four leading candidates bring some profile to the race: Buckhout ran here in 2022, Buck has served as sheriff, Rouse is a county commissioner, and Hanig is a sitting state senator. An Emerson poll had Buckhout and Buck as the leaders, but the poll misidentified Hanig. Winner faces Rep. Don Davis (D) in what could be one of the fall's most competitive NC races.

`New favorable map` `5-person field`

4TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT · DURHAM/TRIANGLE — D Primary

★ 4th Congressional District (D)

Valerie Foushee *Incumbent, backed by Cooper, Stein, others* **Nida Allam** *Durham Co. Commissioner, backed by Sanders*
Mary Patterson *Longshot*

Foushee is the incumbent in this rematch of the 2022 primary for the same seat, albeit under different district lines. Allam carried Durham before; now Durham dominates. Allam raised ~$334K while Foushee took in ~$140K — but outside money far exceeds the direct expenditures, making it perhaps the most expensive primary in NC history. Allam has secured the endorsement of Bernie Sanders; Foushee has the endorsement of the Durham Committee on the Affairs of Black People. Key fault lines: Gaza, Israel, immigration. Allam is the first Muslim woman elected in NC.

`Rematch, new map` `$270K+ Hogg/Allam · $430K+ Foushee outside $` `Dem safe in fall`

HOUSE DISTRICT 106 · MECKLENBURG — D Primary

★ House District 106 (D)

Carla Cunningham *Incumbent, conservative Dem* **Rev. Rodney Sadler** *Challenger, Gov. Stein-backed*
Vermanno Bowman *Lost to Cunningham by 69 pts in 2024*

Cunningham is a conservative Dem who voted with Rs on veto overrides and made comments on immigration that sparked party backlash. The state party has withheld VoteBuilder from Cunningham. Bowman's presence in the race may divide the anti-Cunningham vote, which would work in the incumbent's favor. Winner cruises in November — but outcome matters for veto override math.

`veto override`

HOUSE DISTRICT 27 · NORTHAMPTON/HALIFAX — D Primary

★ House District 27 (D)

Rodney Pierce *Incumbent, Stein-backed* **Michael Wray** *Former rep, lost 2024 by narrowest primary margin in state*

A rematch of the 2024 primary where Pierce bested Wray by the ridiculously narrow margin of 34 votes. Wray was known as a conservative Democrat when in office — willing to break with his party when he saw fit. Pierce is endorsed by Gov. Josh Stein.

`Rematch` `veto override` `Former legislator running`

OTHER FEDERAL 2 races

U.S. SENATE — R Primary

★U.S. Senate (R)

Michael Whatley *Former RNC Chairman, Trump-backed* **Don Brown** *Former Navy JAG, main anti-establishment alternative*
Michele Morrow *Conservative activist, 2024 surprise primary winner* **Margot Dupre** **Richard Dansie** **Elizabeth A. Temple** **Thomas Johnson**

Whatley is the clear establishment favorite with Trump's backing. Morrow, who was the surprise winner of the Superintendent of Public Instruction primary in 2024, is hoping to mobilize the grassroots but has had little support in the polls. Much of the anti-establishment energy that lifted Morrow in 2024 has shifted to Brown, and some of her former allies — even people who worked on her last campaign — have publicly broken with her. Whatley is the heavy favorite — the only real question is what the margin of victory is.

`vs. Gov. Cooper (D) in fall` `Trump endorsement`

11TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT · WESTERN NC — D Primary

11th Congressional District (D)

Jamie Ager *Farmer/businessman; grandfather held this seat in the 1980s; 4x cash lead, DCCC-backed* **Paul Maddox** *Cancer researcher*
Richard Hudspeth *Former CEO, UNC Blue Ridge Health* **Zelda Briarwood** *Party activist* **Lee Whipple** *Civil engineer*

Hoping to flip this district that has been in Republican hands since 2012. Ager is heavily favored with 4x the cash of all opponents combined. This is a pickup attempt in R-friendly mountain territory against Rep. Chuck Edwards. The DCCC has backed Ager, sparking complaints from other candidates.

`Helene recovery` `DCCC-backed: Ager` `R-lean district`

OTHER GENERAL ASSEMBLY RACES TO WATCH

State House 11 races

HOUSE DISTRICT 1 · CHOWAN/CURRITUCK/DARE (PARTIAL)/PERQUIMANS/TYRRELL/WASHINGTON — R Primary

House District 1 (R)

Ed Goodwin *Four-term incumbent; chairs Agriculture Appropriations and Homeland Security committees*
John Spruill *Washington County Commissioner; background in criminal justice and construction*

Goodwin, a Chowan County native and former Naval Criminal Investigative Service agent, has held the seat since 2019. Spruill is the Washington County Commission chair and a fire chief — he's running on rural infrastructure, broadband, and healthcare access. Safe R in the fall.

`Incumbent vs. county commissioner` `Rural NE NC`

HOUSE DISTRICT 37 · WAKE COUNTY — D Primary

House District 37 (D)

Winn Decker *Education policy consultant* **Marcus Gadson** *UNC-Chapel Hill law professor* **Ralph Clements** *Health care consultant*

One of a handful of viable Dem pickup opportunities in the fall. Rep. Pare won by 6 pts in 2024 — competitive but not a gimme. Nominee would need a blue wave. Primary determines which Dem gets that shot.

`Pickup opportunity`

HOUSE DISTRICT 60 · HIGH POINT/GUILFORD — D Primary

House District 60 (D) — Open

Amanda Cook *High Point City Councilwoman (appointed incumbent)* **Angie Williams-McMichael** *Former charter school teacher*
Joe Alston *Former Guilford Co. Dem Party chair* **Bruce Davis** *Former Guilford Co. Commissioner*

Seat vacated after Rep. Cecil Brockman resigned following arrest on charges involving sexual offenses against minors. Local Dems named Cook to fill the vacancy, but she must win a competitive primary. D-safe in fall.

`open seat`

HOUSE DISTRICT 79 · BEAUFORT — R Primary

House District 79 (R)

Keith Kidwell *Incumbent, House Freedom Caucus leader* **Darren Armstrong** *Farmer/businessman, backed by Dixon & Troxler*

Kidwell leads the House Freedom Caucus and pressed colleagues to kill the shrimp trawling bill, along with other prominent conservative positions. Agriculture Committee Chair Dixon openly recruited Armstrong — Kidwell says it stems from his opposition to a pesticide liability farm bill provision. Classic establishment vs. insurgent.

HOUSE DISTRICT 90 · SURRY/WILKES — R Primary

House District 90 (R) — Open

A.J. Daoud *Lost 2024 state treasurer primary* **Dan Kiger** *Veteran State Highway Patrol trooper* **Paul Barker** *Former Chief Deputy, Surry Co. Sheriff's Office*

This is a race to fill the seat currently occupied by Sarah Stevens, who has announced for NC Supreme Court. AJ Daoud has strong name recognition thanks to his recent run for NC Treasurer, but this one is considered up for grabs.

`open seat`

HOUSE DISTRICT 95 · IREDELL — R Primary

House District 95 (R)

Todd Carver *Incumbent ($11K cash)* **Mike Kubiniec** *School board member ($7K cash)*

Kubiniec was involved in a 2023 texting scandal (possible open meetings law violations) and a profanity-laced scuffle with the school board chair. Carver is the favorite but Kubiniec is no stranger to contentious battles.

HOUSE DISTRICT 99 · MECKLENBURG

D Primary

House District 99 (D)

Nasif Majeed *Incumbent, no VoteBuilder access* **Tucker Neal** *UNC Charlotte student* **Veleria Levy** *CEO, HerHealth Consulting*

Majeed missed the initial vote on legislation restricting gender-affirming care and library book access, then cast the vote that gave Republicans the margin they needed to override Stein's veto. The party has denied Majeed VoteBuilder — similar to what they did for Cunningham. Two first-time challengers could split the progressive vote and help Majeed survive.

veto override

HOUSE DISTRICT 110 · GASTON

R Primary

House District 110 (R)

Kelly Hastings *Incumbent since 2010, initially said he wouldn't run* **Caroline Eason** *PharmD, UNC-Chapel Hill — outraised Hastings*

Hastings announced retirement then reversed course. Eason jumped in with energy and outraised him — the two entered 2026 with comparable sums. Young, hungry challenger vs. 16-year incumbent.

HOUSE DISTRICT 113 · POLK/WESTERN NC

R Primary

House District 113 (R)

Jake Johnson *Incumbent, Deputy Majority Whip* **Mike Hager** *Former House Majority Leader (resigned 2016)*

It was a bit of a surprise when Hager, the former House Majority Leader and now a lobbyist, entered the race to challenge Jake Johnson, the Deputy Majority Whip who is often considered a rising star in the NC House. Both candidates have over $100,000. This one is a bit of a referendum on NC House leadership.

Helene recovery

HOUSE DISTRICT 118 · HAYWOOD

R Primary

House District 118 (R)

Mark Pless *Incumbent, now chairs disaster recovery committee* **Jimmy Rogers** *Longtime school board member*

Pless initially balked at the 2024 Helene relief bill but ultimately voted with his party on the veto override. Now chairs emergency management/disaster recovery committee. With no polling, it's hard to know what will happen, but the vibes say it could be close.

Helene recovery

HOUSE DISTRICT 119 · JACKSON, SWAIN & TRANSYLVANIA

R Primary

★House District 119 (R)

Mike Clampitt *4-term incumbent, House Freedom Caucus — undergoing leukemia treatment*
Anna Ferguson *EBCI enrolled member, family electrical & retail business, Cherokee — NC Jobs PAC backing*
Mike Yow *Anti-Trump R, recently switched parties — longshot*

Clampitt is a four-term incumbent currently undergoing treatment for acute myeloid leukemia. Ferguson, an enrolled Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians member, brings a business background and a distinct constituency. She's backed by NC Jobs PAC, which has flooded the district with mailers and signage. Burrows ran in 2024 and lost to Clampitt by 11 points — the winner here faces him again in November.

Helene recovery EBCI/tribal sovereignty Clampitt <$1,200 raised through end of 2025 NC Jobs PAC to Ferguson

State Senate 4 races

SENATE DISTRICT 1 · COASTAL (OPEN SEAT)

R Primary

Senate District 1 (R) — Open

Tess Judge *Challenger* **Clark Tifft** *Challenger* **Timothy Tillett** *Facing recording dispute over alleged racial slur* **Bill Lane** *Has establishment ag support*

Hanig left this coastal seat to run for Congress (NC-01). Four-way R primary for a safe GOP seat. Tillett is facing a recording dispute involving the alleged use of a racial slur. Lane has establishment agricultural support. Safe R in the fall.

open seat Tillett controversy

SENATE DISTRICT 18 · WAKE/GRANVILLE

R Primary

Senate District 18 (R)

Cheryl Caulfield *Wake Co. school board member; endorsed by State Auditor Boliek and Rep. Pare* **Chris Stock** *Attorney & lobbyist; former aide to a NC senator*

Whoever wins faces Democratic incumbent Sen. Terence Everitt — who won in 2024 by just 128 votes while Trump carried the district, one of only three Democrats to win in Trump districts. Republicans see SD-18 as their best shot at taking back a Wake County Senate seat, and expect to spend heavily in the fall.

Key fall target Everitt won 24 by 128 votes

SENATE DISTRICT 22 · DURHAM

D Primary

Senate District 22 (D)

Sophia Chitlik *Freshman incumbent* **DeDreana Freeman** *Narrowly lost Durham City Council reelection in 2025*

Freeman lost her Durham City Council race last year — a mixed signal — but she has the organizational groundwork from that campaign to draw on. Chitlik is a freshman without a long incumbency advantage.

SENATE DISTRICT 34 · CABARRUS

R Primary

Senate District 34 (R)

Chris Measmer *Incumbent (appointed), Cabarrus Co. Commissioner* **Kevin Crutchfield** *Former rep, lost reelection 2024*

Seat opened when Senate Majority Leader Paul Newton retired from the General Assembly. Crutchfield is a former legislator who was known as a more moderate member. Not a lot of money in this race — at least as of the last campaign finance report — although a recent Charlotte Observer report reveals that DraftKings is putting money and ads behind Crutchfield.

Former legislator running

COURTS — APPELLATE 2 races

COURT OF APPEALS — SEAT 3 D Primary

Court of Appeals Seat 3 (D)

James Whalen *Appellate atty, Brooks Pierce — firm defended Justice Riggs in 2024* **Christine Walczyk** *18-yr Wake Co. district court judge*

Open seat (Judge Allegra Collins retiring). Both candidates have assembled prominent endorsements from former justices, former appellate judges, and other legal figures — making this one of the more interesting judicial primaries on the ballot.

open seat

COURT OF APPEALS — SEAT 1 (VS. DEM INCUMBENT ARROWOOD) R Primary

Court of Appeals Seat 1 (R)

Matt Smith *Union Co. Superior Court Judge (Campbell Law)* **Michael Byrne** *Administrative Law Judge (Campbell Law)*

Both are Campbell Law grads battling over who is more conservative. Smith has zeroed in on a $500 contribution Byrne made to Arrowood back in 2018, before Court of Appeals races became partisan — Byrne says he had no idea Arrowood was a Democrat at the time. Byrne cites law enforcement endorsements. Winner faces incumbent Judge John Arrowood (D) in the fall.

LOCAL RACES 4 races

ASHEVILLE CITY COUNCIL · 3 SEATS · NONPARTISAN PRIMARY · MARCH 3 Nonpartisan

★Asheville City Council — Nonpartisan · 3 seats

INCUMBENTS SEEKING REELECTION

Maggie Ullman *Top vote-getter in 2022 primary* **Sheneika Smith** *Incumbent* **Antanette Mosley** *Vice Mayor — under cloud*

SELECTED CHALLENGERS (17 OTHERS IN FIELD)

Drew Ball **Jeffrey Burroughs** **Scott Burroughs** **R. Blake Butler** **Tiffany DeBellott** **Dan Ferrell** **Angel Gonzales** **Nina Ireland**
Shaunda Jackson **Tyler Ladd** **Jess Young McLean** **David Moritz** **Bobby Smith** **CJ Snyder** **Kyle Turner** **Jared Wheatley**
Keith Young

The city is staring down a $30M budget shortfall — residents are pushing back hard on projected tax increases and service cuts, including to public transit. That fiscal crisis, plus lingering Helene recovery frustrations, likely explains why 20 people filed for 3 seats. The field is certain to produce progressive winners; the question is which ones. Mosley's incumbency advantage is damaged: the vice mayor is under active NC State Board of Elections investigation after records showed she claimed a homestead exemption on an Atlanta property — worth $19,000+ in tax savings from 2018-2025 — available only to primary residents, while registering to vote and run for office in Asheville. Mosley maintains she is in Asheville "90% of the time." Name recognition favors Ullman and Smith; Mosley's cloud — and a large field — could shake up who makes the top 6. 20 candidates · top 6 advance · voters pick 3.

$30M budget gap Helene recovery Mosley residency probe Nonpartisan — progressive field

JACKSON COUNTY · COMMISSION CHAIR · SYLVA AREA R Primary

★Jackson County Commission Chair

Jarrett Crowe **Jon Brown** *Conservative challenger, former Sylva Town commissioner*
David Rogers *More conservative — explicit backing of local GOP party apparatus* **Mark Letson** *Incumbent chair — lone dissenter on library withdrawal*

A surprisingly consequential local race. The all-R commission voted 4-1 to withdraw from the **Fontana Regional Library system** over LGBTQ content disputes — driven in part by what the Smoky Mountain News describes as "misinformation and outside agitation" — with Letson casting the lone no vote both on withdrawal. The county's general fund has ballooned 49% over four budget cycles ($71.7M to $106.9M), and a $34M capital project portfolio has swelled to $65M+. Rogers' explicit endorsement by the local GOP party organization has itself drawn criticism.

Library exit — costs tripling 49% budget growth Local GOP backing Rogers

WAKE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY · OPEN SEAT D Primary

★Wake County District Attorney

Wiley Nickel *Former Congressman — no prosecutorial experience (defense atty)*
Sherita Walton *Former ADA in Manhattan & Wake; endorsed by outgoing DA Freeman; would be Wake's first Black DA*
Melanie Shekita *Decades as Wake ADA; leads Special Victims Unit; endorsed by judges & prosecutors*

DA Lorrin Freeman is retiring after 11+ years. Because Wake leans left, the D primary will decide the winner of the general election. Nickel, who dropped out of the US Senate race to endorse Roy Cooper, is the best-known name — but he is a defense attorney, not a prosecutor. Freeman endorsed Walton; Shekita and Walton are running on prosecutorial experience. Nickel's name ID vs. the professionals' credibility is the central tension.

open seat D primary = general Statewide impact (capital county) Former legislator running

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These races are far from the only interesting primary elections in NC. But I've got to cut it off somewhere.

Sources: *The Assembly NC — "10 NC Primaries to Watch in 2026" (Feb. 2026); "16 More NC Primaries to Watch" by Bryan Anderson (Feb. 10, 2026) · WUNC — "Longtime Sheriff Seeks to Unseat Powerful NC Senate Republican Leader" by Colin Campbell (Feb. 23, 2026); "Six Downballot NC Primaries Worth Watching" (Feb. 24, 2026) · News & Observer — "Inside NC's High-Stakes Primary Races" (Feb. 2026); NC Primary Voter Guide (2026) · Charlotte Observer — Editorial Board endorsements in 2026 primary elections (Feb. 2026) · Smoky Mountain News — "Republican Primary Tests Identity and Power in the 119th District" by Cory Vaillancourt (Feb. 2026); "Pless Positions Himself as Steady Hand Amid Slow Recovery" by Cory Vaillancourt (Feb. 4, 2026) · Outer Banks Voice — "It's Goodwin vs. Spruill in the Primary for the NC House District 1 Seat" by Mark Jurkowitz (Feb. 19, 2026) · Asheville Watchdog (Feb. 2026) · Blue Ridge Public Radio (Feb. 2026) · Spectrum News 1 — "Big Races to Watch Tuesday in North Carolina's Primary" by Reuben Jones (Feb. 27, 2026) · NC Newsline · WRAL · Ballotpedia · NC State Board of Elections campaign finance filings · Compiled Feb. 2026*

The format is modeled loosely on the one used by Bolts Magazine's election cheat sheets.

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